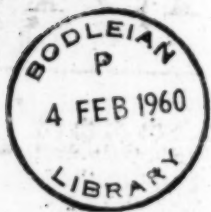


A
LETTER
TO THE
DEISTS.



L O N D O N,
Printed for *Edward Castle*,
next *Scotland-Yard*, by
Whitehall, 1696.



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GENTLEMEN,

THAT a Letter addressed to you, in this Publick manner, may not seem strange; I think my self obliged, in the first place, to acquaint you with the reason of my Writing it.

Your Title is New. At least, it is not many Years, since

Deism has been taken for a Characteristical Distinction, of any considerable Number or Body of Men. But however New that Title be, I confess, I esteem it more honourable, in its true Signification, than any thing can be, upon the account of meer Antiquity. Nevertheless, I remember particularly, that the first time I ever heard it thus used, was in a way of Censure; Which then did not a little surprize me. I considered barely what the Word imported; And could not conceive, with what colour, the Belief or Worship of a Deity was thought worthy of blame. For, reflecting upon my self, my own Conscience told me that I was included in the Sense
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of the Expression ; But it did not upon that account reproach me with any manner of Guilt. I was sure that my Belief of a God had, by no means, made me a worse Man or worse Subject, than I should have been without it: But much the contrary. Next therefore, reflecting upon the Narrowness and Bigottry of his Spirit that spoke to me, (for he was wedded to a Party) I concluded that his partial Zeal made him mis-apply the Term, and join an ill Idea to a good thing.

In this Perswasion I remained long : And was satisfied with the Integrity of my own Mind, notwithstanding the Obloquy which attended my Principles. Nay, it was also some

further Delight to me (who am not fond of our ordinary Distinctions of Sects) that I had found a Name, however mistaken by others, which I could sincerely and heartily own. And I thereupon sometimes, jestingly, compared my Pleasure in this, to that of the Citizen in the Comedy, who was over-joyed to learn that he had all his life been accustomed to speak *Prose*, tho' without knowing it : Which Comparison I thought the more just, because true *Deism* is in effect as natural and easie to Mankind as *Prose*, or ordinary Speech. For it is impossible for us to reflect upon our selves, and upon all the Objects that surround us, without admiring
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and adoring the Almighty Author both of them and us. And as I had indeed been long a *Deist*, before I was acquainted with the Name; So I continued for several Years afterwards, to cultivate the Consequences of that Principle, in my own Mind, and to inculcate occasionally the Necessity of it to others; Fully perswaded that it was the only Foundation, upon which either the true Happiness of particular Persons, or any tolerable Degree of mutual Security in the Conduct of Publick Societies, could be established.

But, Alas, how have I been mistaken! Is *Deism* an ill thing? Or have Ill Men shrowded themselves under that Specious

Name? Somewhat is in the Matter. For the Out-cry against *Deists* is now grown so strong, that no body can suppose it to be wholly without ground. I beseech you therefore, Gentlemen, give me leave to expostulate a little with you; That we may come to some clearness in the point, and be thereby inabled to vindicate our selves from the infamous Aspersions that are cast upon us. You see that I reckon my self in your Number: And if you are true *Deists*, I assure you we are Brethren. Let that Consideration, therefore, prevail with you to bear with me, whilst I require, and earnestly sollicit you, to assist me in the Defence of our Common Cause.

This,

This, then, being the Design of my Letter, it is absolutely needful that, in the first place, we come to a Scrutiny amongst our selves; And examine strictly what it is we mean by the Name; And whether or no we do indeed own the Things that are imputed to us. The word, *Deist*, I take to signifie no more than One that believes a God; And *Deism* the Religion of One that so believes. Those words, I am sure, in their natural signification, do not exclude any other Belief, unless it be opposite to, or inconsistent with this. My Belief that there is a God does not hinder me from believing any other thing, that is not apparently contradictory to the Idea that I have entertained

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tained of him. If I have not a clear Demonstration, from that Idea, of the impossibility of any thing proposed to my Belief, I may, and ought to examine the probability of that thing (especially if it be Matter of Fact) by the Credibility of the Witnesses that report it. And so, in the Histories that we have of the Life of *Moses*, of *Christ*, of *Apollonius*, or of *Mahomet*, I may give more or less Credit to any of them, according to the different strength of their Testimonials. A *Deist* (for any thing that the word imports) may be either Jew or Christian, Philosopher or Turk; Nay, indeed, all Religionists whatsoever must necessarily be *Deists*. Never any Appellation
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was invented more truly Catholick. Only *Atheists* are excluded from it.

How comes it then to pass that a Word of, so great a Latitude, is used in so narrow a sense, as to signifie a very small number of those that have equal right to it? Nay sometimes to signifie those that have no such Right at all? That it is thus used, we cannot doubt: Daily Conversation assures us of it. The Reason of this Abuse, must of necessity come, either from those that have assumed, or those that have imposed the Name. Nay, by the best observation I have been able to make, it seems to me that both sides have contributed hereunto; by fixing

ing something Negative to the Signification of the Word, which it does not import. Those that impose it, do thereby at least understand a Denial of the Grounds of Revealed Religion; In which indeed they stretch the Word too far: But whilst some of those that assume it, do at the same time deny the very Principles of Natural Religion also, They plainly abuse and pervert it, directly contrary to what it signifies; And usurp a Title that no ways belongs to them. For tho' the Belief of a God do not necessarily imply the Belief of Supernatural Revelation; (many having acknowledged a Supream Being, infinitely Wise and Powerful and Good, who
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have been altogether unacquainted with any Manifestation of his Will, otherwise than by the Use of their own Faculties in the contemplation of his Works) Yet it does necessarily carry along with it a Reverential sense of Duty towards him : Which is the ground of Natural Religion. And, therefore, tho' the Denial of Revelation do not properly make Men *Deists*, in the strict sense of the Word; Yet the total want of Natural Religion does absolutely hinder them from being *Deists*, in any sense whatsoever. Let us then, who insist upon a Right to that Title, in the first place discard those who are wholly destitute of this sense, from our Fraternity.

nity. And let us afterwards consider, as we are able, what our Fundamental Article, (the Belief of a Deity) does, or does not, oblige us to.

It is not simply the word, *God*, but the Idea fixed to that Word, which is capable of having any Influence, either upon Men's Minds or Conversations. And it is not impossible, but some Ideas of a Deity may have a worse Influence upon them than none at all. Wherefore it highly imports us to observe, whether some Persons, that own the Name, do not yet take away the thing; Or perhaps even substitute a worse in the stead of it. Those that say directly there is no God, are not *Deists*, but *Atheists*. It is
neither

neither of such, nor to such, that I write. For in these Parts of the World, the Notion of a Deity is so universally spread and received, that no man dares own the open Profession of down-right *Atheism*. So that this sort of Men (if perhaps there are any few such) are the less dangerous. But those that retaining the usual Word, endeavour slyly to insinuate a Corrupt sense of it, ought so much the more carefully to be watched, by how much the more their Title and Outside is less apt to give any suspicion of their Design.

My Intention yet is not to inquire into all the several sorts of Gods that these Men frame to themselves. It has been done
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in a great measure by others; And the inconsistency of their Notions very accurately exposed. To do it thorowly were an endless Task: For I much doubt, whether any two of them agree intirely in any one System. But if, in pursuing some of their Principal Hypotheses, I shew the mischievous influence that all such like Opinions must needs have upon the whole State of Mankind, in this World; I hope I shall perswade you, Gentlemen, my Brethren, who are true *Deists*, to concurr with me in owning your detestation of such pernicious Principles.

Which of them shall I then chuse? It is very indifferent. For all their several Schemes
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do equally lead to Irreligion; And consequently to the utter ruin of Humane Societies. Some Men, because Mr. *Hobbs* relished not the sound of Immaterial Substances (without ever considering whether they are able to frame to themselves any more distinct conception of the substance of Matter) fear not, upon his Authority, to ridicule the Notion of Spirit. These, without trying their Skill upon particulars, resolve in general the Structure of the whole Universe, and of all the Animate Beings which replenish it, into the unexplicable Powers of Matter and Motion. Let it be so. For I enter not into the Absurdity of their Philosophy, which has been sufficiently refuted

futed by others. I will only consider some Consequences of it, with respect to our selves. If there be nothing but Matter in the World; Then Thought is either a Property necessarily belonging to, and inherent in Matter; Or the Result of some particular Figure and Motion impress'd upon it. The first they will not say: Because the Parings of their own Nails convince them it is false. But the second, for any thing they know, may be: And therefore they say it is. I pass over also this precarious *May be*, which others have fully demonstrated *cannot be*: And admitting their Conclusion, That it is; (*viz.* That the Principle of Wisdom which discovers it-self in the
Frame

Frame and Government of the Universe, is only an Effect of the Position and Motion of its Parts) Then, however, I say, amongst infinite other Absurdities, they must allow that this Principle, this Effect, this God (as they would call it) must be liable to all the changes that happen in the Universal Mass of Matter. For if it consist only in some particular System, that can receive no impression from the rest; Then neither can it make any impression upon the rest: And so there is an End of all its Energy. But if they will say that Matter moves always uniformly, and that therefore the Wisdom of their God is stable; I answer, that the uniform Motion

Motion of the Particles of Matter is either (in empty space) an Eternal Progression of separate Particles in straight lines; The supposition of which, is the same thing, in respect of the Energy of every Particle, as I have even now express'd concerning a particular System remov'd from any Communication with the rest : Or else, (in a mixture of several Particles) it is a regular Impulse of one Particle upon another, according to Bulk, Figure, Swift-ness, and Incidence; Which, besides that it gives us no Idea of any possibility of Thought resulting from such Variety of Figures and Motions; Yet if we should allow that some peculiar Hit, in an infinite Variety
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of such Modifications, might produce it, together with Knowledge and Wisdom in the highest Degree; Nevertheless, we must of necessity allow that every Variation of that particular Modification which produces them, must not only disturb but utterly destroy them. So that all the possible Variety of Figure and Motion that we can conceive in Matter, shews us either an impossibility of any thing like Thought resulting from it, or at least a Necessity of the Inconstancy and Changeableness of that Thought, with every change in the Matter which produces it. And thus every way that we can turn the Notion of a Material God, if we do (in defiance

fiance of all fence) allow him Existence; Yet we can not avoid to acknowledge him subject to Disturbances, Diseases, Passions, and all manner of Alterations that are incident to Matter, and altogether unsuitable to the Perfections which we must of necessity attribute to the Supreme Deity.

This then is the God which these Men frame to themselves. At least, this is the Idea of the God that results from their Hypothesis, whether they describe him so or no. A Worthy God indeed ! Not the Creator or Disposer of this Universal Frame of things, but the Effect of some Peculiar Disposition in it; Posterior to Matter, and liable (if not to Extinction) at least

least to Inconstancy, Fluctuation, and Change. If this be He, no wonder if they bear little Respect to him. A contingent and transitory thing : To which whilst they endeavour to give some Solidity, by drawing him out of lumpish Matter, they are forced so to volatilize their own Imaginations, that they destroy the very Idea which they pretend to give of him.

But before we contemplate the Consequences of this Hypothesis, let us consider Another. And because This plainly takes away the thing that it pretends to constitute, and instead of a fundamental Cause, puts us off with a very transitory Effect, let us set before
our

our Eyes One Omnipotent Universal Cause of all things. For such an Idea some Men are apt to give of God. Without determining any thing about his Substance, whether Material or Immaterial; They suppose it suitable to the perfection of his Nature, that (in the first Constitution of the Universe) he should have impressed such an Energy into the Texture and Frame of it, as is capable for ever afterwards to continue all the Appearances of things; that we are or are not acquainted withal, without his intermeddling or interposing any more in the Production, Guidance or Government of any thing whatsoever. It is (at least) below his Dignity,

nity, say they, to concern himself in the vain Tumults of Mankind, and to co-operate either with or against any of our Projects, by his immediate Influx. His business, if it be any, is about higher things; far remote from our Cognizance. We are pitiful Engines, moved any way by the Impressions made upon our Senses, by things without us; And so necessitated to whatsoever we do, by the fatal Chain of Causes in which he at first linked the whole Universe.

I pretend not, in these two particulars, to give any exact System of the Opinions of Ancient Philosophers. The fortuitous jumbings of *Democritean* Atomes, The Idle Deity

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of

of the *Epicureans*, And the fatal Necessity of the *Stoicks*, are not the Subject of my Enquiry. But a mixture of such Thoughts as these, I am sure, fill the Heads of many who now call themselves *Deists*, and make too ordinary a Subject of Modern Conversation. And it is upon the Benefit of this Age, and of my own Country (if I might be able in the least Degree to contribute towards it) that my Thoughts are now intent.

To these, therefore, I will add yet another Opinion, that has great Affinity with them. Some Men, without troubling themselves in any manner about the Notion of a Deity, and considering only how evidently

dently our Thoughts depend upon the Disposition of the Organs of our Body (because we see the Disorders that oft arise in our Minds, from the Affections to which they are incident) are apt boldly to conclude, and maintain, that an absolute Dissolution of this Organical Texture, (which all Men are subject to in Death) must of necessity extinguish the Principle of Thought that we have now in us, and leave nothing capable of any Conscious Reflections upon our preceeding Life.

I have said already that I intended not to meddle with the Philosophical Absurdity of any of these Opinions. They have, I think, been sufficiently

refuted by others. My Business now is to consider the Moral Influence that they are apt to have upon Men's Lives, and upon Societies ; And to intreat you, Gentlemen, to consider how unworthy a thing it is that the Glorious Name of *Deism* should be stained with such abominable Consequences.

Take any, take all of their Opinions together, and as many more such like as you may meet withal suggested by any particular persons : What do they all amount to ? Just as it was said of * *Epicurus*, of old ; *Whilst to avoid Offence, they make use of the Name of God,*

* *Video nonnullis videri Epicurum, ne in offensionem Atheniensium caderet, verba reliquisse Deos, re sustulisse.* Cic. de Nat. D. L. 1.

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they, nevertheless, destroy the Thing ; And in effect absolutely remove him out of the * World. A Material God, sprung from the fortuitous jumbings of Atomes, or from ever so regular Motions supposed to be in the Universal Mass of Matter ; Such a God, I say, is evidently the Result of such Causes ; Far from being himself the first Cause of all things. And it can not be denied, but he must be liable to continual Alterations, with the whiffling of every Wind. What Effect now can the Idea of such a God as this have upon the Minds of Men ? We may think it a fine

* Tu deniq; Epicure, Deum inermem facis. Omnia illi Tela, omnis detraxisti Potentiam : Es ne cuiquam metuendus esset, projecisti ipsum extra mundum. Seneca De Benef. l. 4. c. 19.

thing; and gape and wonder at it: But that is all. On the other side, take as Spiritual a God as you please; If you suppose him absolutely removed from all Cognizance of our affairs, * What are we concerned in the Contemplation of him? The History of what he once transacted, in framing the World, (supposing he did it) is no more to us, nay not so much as a mere Romance; Because That, (by the Application we may make of it to our own Circumstances) is fitted for our Instruction. And his Retirement now, is just as the Death

* *Qua pietas ei debetur à quo nihil acceperis? Aut quid omnino, cujus nullum meritum sit, ei deberi potest?* Cic. de Nat. Deor. l. 2.

Nam quid erit quare solito dignemur honore Numina, si demas velle juvare Deos? Ovid. de Pont. Lib. 2.

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of such a Romantick Hero. Or further, if you suppose this God that now supinely reposes, to have framed the Universal Engine (and us as part of it) at first so perfectly, that no Wheel, no Spring, no Counterpoize can ever hereafter fail, in the performance of those Functions that he designed them for, but all Effects will be * necessarily produced for ever by this uninterrupted Chain of Causes; What does this Doctrine teach us, more than that we our selves are some little inconsiderable Parts

* *Fatis agimur: cedite Fatis. Non felicitæ possunt cura mutare rati stamina fusi. Quicquid patimur mortale genus, Quicquid facimus venit ex alto. Servatq; sua decreta celus Lachesis, dura revoluta manu. Omnia certo tramite vadunt: Primusq; dies dedit extremum. Non illa Deo vertisse licet, Quæ nexa suis currunt causis. It cuiq; ratus, prece non ullâ Mobilis, ordo. Sen.in Oed.*

in a stupendious Piece of Excellent Clock-Work? None of these things are, in the least, proper to influence any of our Actions. And if, in the last place, we add to these, the Opinion of the Mortality of our Souls; What other Thought can that suggest to us, than that we should Eat and Drink, and (without any restraint) satiate our selves with whatsoever is Delightful here; As having no Law (I mean more than humane) to check us, nor any expectation of a Subsistence hereafter?

This being the Case, I would fain know of these *Deists* at large, what real difference they make in the Consequence and use of their Opinions to Humane

mane Life, from those of the directest *Atheism*? What Difference to me is there between a God that neither can influence here, nor will ever hereafter animadvert upon my Actions, and no God at all? I would fain learn. I can receive neither Good nor Harm from either Supposition: And therefore am both ways equally at Liberty. But if I take the Supposition of the * fatal God (Him that necessitates me by inevitable and irresistible impulses from without my self, to whatsoever I do) the Consequence of that Belief upon my Mind, must needs be much worse than

* *Qui introducunt causarum seriem sempiternam, et mentem hominis voluntate liberâ solutam necessitate fari devinciant. Cic. de Fato.*

meer *Atheism*. For if I have no freedom of Will, no power to resist the force of that fatal Chain by which I am dragg'd ; I am not capable, in those Circumstances, of doing any Moral either Good or Evil. But for whatever I do, be it never so ill, I may very fairly * excuse my self, and cast the Fault upon him that put me into this Plight. For it lies at his Door, not mine.

I ask then, Would the World receive any considerable Advantage by the spreading of these Opinions? Would Mankind become more Just and True, Sociable and Friendly to one another, in proportion as they

* *Fari ista Culpa est : Nemo sit Fato Necens.* Senec. in *Oedip.*

became

became more and more strongly to disbelieve a Deity, Superintending over their Actions? * Cicero tells us, That there were Philosophers who held that the Gods did not at all intermeddle in the Administration of Humane Affairs. But (says he) if their Opinion be true; What ground is there left for Piety, Sanctity, or Religion? And afterwards he adds, That if those be taken away, Disturbance and Confusion must needs follow: And that where there is no Religion, there can be neither Truth, nor Justice, nor even any Society

Sunt enim Philosophi, & fuerunt, qui omnino nullam habere censerent humanarum rerum procuracionem Deos. Quorum si vera sententia est, qua potest esse Pietas, qua Sanctitas, qua Religio? — Quibus sublati, perturbatio vita sequitur & magna confusio. Atq; haud scio, an pietate adversus Deos sublata, fides etiam, & societas humani generis, atq; una excellentissima virtus, justitia, tollatur. Cic. de Nat. Deor. l. 1.

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34 A LETTER

maintained amongst Men. What is the matter then, that this sort of *Deists* are so busie and industrious in propagating their Notions, and gaining Profelytes? They are, or at least pretend to be, Men of Sence. Nay, many of them pretend not a little to Benevolence and Good-will to Mankind: Which I take to be the great Fountain of all Virtues tending to the Establishment and Welfare of Societies: Surely they have some End proportionable to the Diligence of their Endeavours. It deserves to be enquired into: And I think the Account they give of it is to this purpose.

Religion (they say) or the Belief of a Superintending God,

God, is wholly useless to the Government of Men's Actions, in relation to their Neighbours : Which is all that any one is concerned to look after in another. Humane Laws, fortified by the infliction of Punishments upon all that commit Injuries, are sufficient to restrain the Disorders of that kind, which Innocent Men are exposed to. They do it, in effect, in a good measure. And the Instances of those injurious practices which yet continue, appear so indifferently amongst the Professors of all sorts of Religion, that it is evident, Religion (of any sort) signifies nothing to their Cure : Therefore (say they) Useless. But they also further add, That it
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is not only useless, but hurtful. The Expectation of another State of Life after this, in which Account must be given of our Actions done here, is apt to fill Men's Minds with * Anxieties, Doubt, and Fears; Which debase their Spirits, perplex their thoughts, and render them incapable of attending to many important Duties of Society, with that Diligence, and Steadiness of Resolution that is necessary: And the awful Dread of an avenging God inclines them to all manner of † Super-

* *Quæ fieri in terris cæloq; tumentur Mortales, pavidis cum pendent mentibus sæpe Efficiunt animos humiles formidine divum, Depressos quæ premunt ad terram. Lucr. l. 3.*

† *Jupiter ingentes quæ das adimisq; dolores, Mater ait pueri menses jam quinq; cubantis, Frigida si puerum quartana reliquerit illo Mane die, quo tu indicis jejunia, nudus in Tiberi stabit. Cassius medicusve levarit Aegrum ex præcipiti Mater delira necabit, In gelidâ fixum ripâ, febrimq; reducet. Quone malo mentem concussa? Timore Deorum. Hor. Sat. l. 2.*

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stitious Observances that their own deprav'd Imaginations, or the Craft of Priests perswades them to be the Methods of rendring him Propitious. On this Head they expatiate with pleasure. The perversion of true Religion by Priest-craft affords them (God knows) too great an Advantage. They find it easie to discover the Abuses of this, or that, or the other particular Way; And by that means too plausibly, and too prevalently, insinuate unto the Unwary that all Religion, alike, is nothing else but a Holy Cheat.

But let us, I beseech you, Gentlemen, that are *Deists* in reality, and not in Name only, examine the reality of these
Preten-

Pretensions. If there be a God, an intelligent Being, infinitely Powerful, and Wise, and Good, (all which he must of necessity be, if he be at all) I say, if there be such a God, it is impossible that these Affirmations or Inferences (of these pretended Deists) can be true. The Knowledge of such a God, and those consequences of Love and Reverence and Duty, which naturally arise from that knowledge, can by no means be insignificant, and much less prejudicial to his Creatures.

If Humane Laws alone are sufficient for the Weal of Mankind in Societies, then it is true that any thing further is superfluous and impertinent, with respect to that End. But are they

they indeed so? I desire the Assertors of that Position, to give me some Instance of a Nation, or considerable Body of People, since the World began, that ever formed themselves into a Society, and liv'd in any Degree, (I will not say of Happiness, but) even of such Misery as we can count tolerable; Who, at the same time, denied absolutely the Existence of a powerful Being, presiding over the Universe by his Providence here; And thought themselves perfectly secure against all danger of being call'd to account by him hereafter. When they have done that, they will have some seeming ground for their Assertion: But if that can not be done, the Authority of all Nations,

Nations, in all Ages, will be so strong a Prejudice against it, as others will not easily overcome; And (if they have any Degree of Modesty) ought to make them forbear insisting upon it.

But (that I may not seem captiously to put them upon an insuperable Difficulty) if they can not find a Nation of absolute Atheists, let them examine the condition of those that come nearest to it. Philosophical, thinking Men are too thin sown in the World, for us to expect to find any Number of them, that, upon examination of Argument, deliberately concluded there is no God, and instituted a Form of Government amongst themselves upon that

that Principle. We must be content therefore to consider the condition of those People, not that deny a God, but that are ignorant of one. And of them we have many Instances: Whether perfect or no, is not worth enquiring, but certainly to a very great Degree. *Africa* and *America* abound with them. I will not trouble you with the Relations of Travellers, of this kind, which are in ever body's hands. But I desire you, upon the view of all or any of those Relations, to examine whether the Brutality of those Nations do not hold exact proportion with the Degrees of their Irreligion. Those that have no sense at all of a Deity, nor any expectation of a Future Life,
have

43 A LETTER

have no such thing as Government amongst them, nay, nor any Rule for their private Conduct. Now without Government, Combination into Societies, and mutual Assistance, it is impossible that any manner of Conveniencies can be provided for the comfortable Sustenance of Humane Life. In every thing that we make use of, we stand in need of one another's * help. Those that enjoy not that benefit, are left to the condition of Beasts: Nay, much worse than those Beasts that live upon the Fruits of the Earth; Because of the real want,

* *Quo alio tuti sumus quam quod mutuis juvamus officiis?—Fac nos singulos, quid sumus? Præda animalium & Victimæ: ac vilissimus & facillimus sanguis.—Hominem imbecillitas cingit: Non unguis vis, non dentium, terribilem cæteris fecit. Nudum & infirmum Societas munus. Seneca de Ben. l. 4. c. 18.*

or

or lustful Appetite, that all Mankind have after Flesh. They therefore are reduced to the Condition of Beasts of Prey : But yet much worse than them too ; Because Nature has not provided Men with any such competent Defence against the Injuries of the Air as are the Skins of Bears and Lions ; Nor with such Arms as are their Teeth and Claws. Which, by the way, is a manifest proof that Nature never intended Men for that kind of Life : For we find unexceptionably throughout all the Species of Animals, that every one is by Nature provided with Members, or Instruments, directly suited to that kind of Prey which Nature designed for their

their support. But naked Man, unassisted with Tools, (which are the Products of Arts and Society) is the worst provided of them all.

It may indeed be said, that instead of these, we have hands, wherewith we can employ every thing that we find about us, to our purpose ; And a Genius capable to improve all things to our best Advantage. 'Tis true. But the same Capacity inables us also, at the same time, to do so much the more Mischief. And this is the most deplorable Circumstance of all, in the state of those Savages ; who having neither any manner of Government amongst them here, nor sense of a Superintending Deity, with expectation

tion of Rewards or Punishments hereafter, can have no other Rule of their private Conduct, than the present Impulse of every unruly Appetite. By this means (I say) it comes to pass, that, as the Capacity of their Mind is greater than that of Bears, their condition also comes to be so much the more miserable. For admitting that a Bear or a Lion were less fitted by Nature for procuring the Prey that they stand in need of, than is one of these Unassociated Savages; Yet it must (in the first place) be acknowledged that they are less exposed to be preyed upon themselves. They reign Sovereigns over the inferior Herds of Animals, in the Countries where they inhabit;
And

46 A LETTER

And are at perfect * Amity with those of their own kinds: Whereas with Man it is wholly otherwise. For He (in the next place) is not only liable to the Surprizes and Assaults of many sorts of ravenous Beasts; But most of all to those of his own Species. No Man, in this Estate, can be secure from his Neighbour. The Capacity of Mind that every one is endow'd with, suggests to him many Advantages to be made of his Brethren. And hereupon, every Man designing his own private Advantage, becomes his Neighbour's Enemy; And they mu-

* — *Parcit Cognatis maculis similis fera. Quando Leoni Fortior eripuit vitam leo? Quo nemere unquam Expiravit aper majoris dantibus apri? Indica tigris agit tabidâ cum tigride pacem Perpetuam, Savis inter se convenit urfis.* Juv. Sat. 15.

tually

tually put each other into the most deplorable State of War imaginable. Thus, in some places, the strongest sell the weakest; nay, Parents many times their Children, into Captivity; For a Bracelet, a Looking-glass, or any other little Bauble that their foolish Fancies are delighted with: And, in other places, they hunt and destroy one another, as we do Hares, directly to satisfy either their hungry or luxurious * Appetites.

This is the plain Matter of Fact. There is no instance to be found, from the beginning of the World to this day, of any People wholly void of all

* *Aspicimus populos quorum non sufficit ira Occidisse aliquem, sed pectora, brachia, vultum Crediderint genus esse cibi.* Juv. Sat. 15.

sense of Religion, whose way of living did not expose them to more Miseries than even the Beasts of the Field or Forest. But it will be said, this is for want of Government: Good Laws would have made their Condition more happy. I grant it, in some Degree. But then I desire the Objectors to shew me an instance of any Government, instituted and established by good Laws, without a mixture of some Religion in it. They can not do it. We have seen the Opinion of *Cicero* already upon that Point. I will here add that of * *Plutarch*. He said, That *he would sooner believe a City might be built without any Foundation, than*

* *Plut. Contr. Coler.*

that

that a Government could either be framed or supported without the Belief of a Deity. Thus, the Effect it-self proves that Mankind is incapable of Government, without Religion. And since these Men themselves are forced to allow Government and Laws to be necessary to any competent degree of Happiness; They must, upon the Evidence of Matter of Fact, allow Religion to be of the same Necessity : Because, the one has never been without the other.

Nay, further yet; If enquiry were made into all particular Histories of the World, and especially into all Religions, I do not doubt but it would be found that the more or less easie

and comfortable way of subsisting in any Nation, has always held and does still hold proportion, with the greater or less sense of true Religion, (unmixt with superstition) that has been spread amongst them. I say, *Religion, unmixt with Superstition*: Because it is not improbable that some Sorts and Degrees of Superstition may be of as evil Tendency, if not worse, than absolute Irreligion; Of which the * Sacrifices that have been anciently made of Mankind, and the Modern Persecutions amongst Sects (to the Destruction of Men's Bodies, as

* *Religio peperit scelerosa atq; impia facta, Aulide, quo pacto Triviai virginis aram Iphianassai turparunt sanguine facde Ductores Danaum*—Lucr. l. 1.

Mos fuit in populis quos condidit advena Dido Poscere eade Deos veniam, ac flagrantibus Aris (Infandum dictu!) parvos imponere Natos. Sil. Ital. l. 4.

is pretended, for the Salvation of their Souls) seems to be a strong Argument. And therefore, without pretending to define for any body else, I think my self obliged (in this place) to explain what I my self understand by both. *True Religion* I take to be an Acknowledgment of a Deity (infinitely Powerful, Wise, and Good) superintending the Actions of Mankind, in order to retribute unto every one, either here or hereafter, according to their Doing; Together with the Sense of an Obligation to all our Duties both to God and our Neighbour, resulting from that Belief. *Superstition*, on the other side, is an Acknowledgment and Dread of God's super-

C 3

inten-

intending Power ; Accompanied with a wrong Opinion of the Ways of pleasing him, resulting from false Ideas, unsuitable to his forementioned Perfections. And let me here add, that *Irreligion* I understand to be an utter insensibility of any Obligation or Duty arising from the Idea of a God ; Or perhaps (according as the Idol may be framed which they set up instead of the Idea of the true God) a positive persuasion that no such Obligation at all can arise. Now I must needs say that, so far as I have had opportunity of observing, I have always found that the more any People have had of True Religion, with less mixture of Superstition, they have
always

always formed themselves unto so much more orderly Societies, and lived so much the more comfortably. So that I am perswaded, whoever takes the pains to examine, will find that the Rule holds true throughout, in exact Proportion.

But leaving now this Appeal to History, to every one's Examination and Judgment; I am desirous to weigh a little the Reason of the thing it-self. Let us inspect the Nature of Mankind as it is, and see what probability there is that any considerable Number of Men, (A Nation, as *England*, for Example) wholly void of all sense of Religion, should be able to establish and maintain such Laws and Methods of Govern-

ment amongst themselves, as could give them any tolerable Degree of mutual Security, Peace and Happiness. In the first place, I am apt to think it very difficult, if not impossible, that such a People should ever agree upon any Terms at all. The Natural Impetuosity of their Passions, must needs make them very untractable. It can not be supposed that those who found their Advantage over others, in strength of Body, would easily submit their Necks to the Yoke of Laws. They would find themselves secure and easie in that natural Superiority, and always endeavour to maintain it : So that it would, at least, be very difficult to bring them to any
Terms

Terms of Composition with their Inferiours.

But let the thing be never so difficult, if it be but possible, I am willing to admit it. We may imagine that a Combination of a great Number of weaker Persons may have been able to force a less Number of those that are stronger into a Compliance : From whence something like a Commonwealth might in the end result. Therefore, without more ado, let us suppose a *Solon*, a *Lycurgus*, or a *Numa*, sprung out of the Earth, to give this People the most excellent Form of Government imaginable. The Supposition, indeed, is absurd; Because those wise Legislators, all of them, did interweave

56 A LETTER

Religion with their Politicks :
 And I want the Name of any
 Legislator that ever did other-
 wise. But supposing, any way,
 an Excellent Form contrived :
 Let Chance, if they please, the
Epicurean God, be the Author
 of it : Where shall we find fit
 Magistrates to put this Excel-
 lent Contrivance in Execution ?
 It will not be supposed that
 every particular Member of this
 Society will be so exactly Vir-
 tuous, as to need no Inspection
 into their Actions. That is too
 contrary to all Experience ; And
 would be occasion of dissol-
 ving the Government it self,
 as frivolous and useless. We
 must therefore look out for Se-
 nators, to deliberate in Ten
 thousand Exigencies that will
 arise

arise from without, (tho' we should imagine our Frame never so perfect within) what Methods may be most conducive to our Common Defence and Publick Welfare. We must have Judges too, undoubtedly, to determine impartially the differences that may happen between Man and Man. And (to cut short) we must have Officers of all kinds, both Civil and Military, to execute faithfully and carefully whatever is resolved upon by these Senators and Judges: Amongst which sort of Business, the Administration of the Publick Revenue is neither the least nor easiest Task.

For these things, we must of necessity have Men of Integrity.

grity. Any failure in That, begets Inconveniencies : And the total want of it brings on inevitable Ruin. For nothing can be done, great or small, without Trust : And the Breach of Trust is always mischievous to the thing in which it happens. For Example ; What can hinder but a Senator that deliberates upon the weighty Affairs of War or Peace with Neighbouring Princes , may have Overtures made to him of more considerable Advantage from some such Prince, than he can receive in his own Country ; And may thereupon, without any Danger of Discovery, reveal and betray the Secrets of a State ? What can hinder but a Judge, biassed by Affection,

Affection, or bribed by Interest, may, in many Cases, so order the Circumstances of things (at least the Methods of his own Proceedings) as to condemn the Innocent, absolve the Guilty, and dispose of the Property of Goods or Land contrary to all Right and Equity; And yet cover his Corruption with a very specious Appearance of Justice? What can hinder but a Commander of Fleets or Armies, by Debauchery growing Supine, or by Covetousness growing intent only on Profit, may sacrifice the Publick to his Luxury or Gain? And what can hinder, in the last place, (for 'twould be too tedious to go through all particulars) but Publick Receivers, Treasurers, and

and the like, may, by Consent and Intelligence with one another, falsifie Accounts, and divert great Branches of the Common Income into their own private Pockets; without any possibility of being detected? Without Integrity in the management of these, and such like affairs, all must needs go wrong; and Ruin follow.

But I doubt my Reader is tired with these Instances; And thinks them frivolous in the particular Case that I now examine; Because they are so very frequent, as every Day's Experience tells us, in all Governments whatsoever. Are they so, indeed? Then let that Government where they are most prevalent, know that it is nearest

rest to utter Destruction. For no body can doubt but where the principal and ruling Functions of a Body (either Civil or Natural) are perverted, and made to operate contrary to the Interest of the whole, That Whole is in a very desperate condition. Let the Application be made where it will.

And if we may look a little home to our own Case; it must be acknowledged that we have amongst us too many Instances of such like Miscarriages as I have represented. What is the Reason of it? Is it the too deep sense and Awe of an All-seeing Deity that causes this want of Integrity, and makes Men not fear to transgress the Ties of any Duty, wheresoever they can
be

be secure, that He alone is Witness of their Actions? This cannot be pretended: Both Experience and Reason contradict it. The Men I write of, and the spreading progress of their Principles, are too apparent Proofs that we are not at this time in such like Circumstances. But if, abstracting from our own Case, we reflect only upon the Mischiefs that attend Bigottry, and wrong Notions about Religion, I readily own them to be very great. For not only, some of those Mistakes may be apt to make Men presume upon an easie way of attoning an offended Deity, by Ceremonious or Devotional Tricks, and therefore less fearful of the Consequences of each single

single Transgression ; But Superstition (generally speaking) has often been, and will be, the occasion of very general Mischiefs and Outrages in the World ; Tho' this especially, when it is managed by the cunning of lawless, and designing irreligious Men in Power. So that Irreligion is, very frequently, the ground even of those Disorders which Superstition produces. For without that, the mistaken Notions about a Deity, will serve indifferent well to preserve Society and maintain Government, amongst those of this or that particular way. The Fear and Dread (at least) of Invisible Powers will not make Men more bold in the Contempt of those

those Powers, than they would be without it. But the total Absence of that Fear (which is Irreligion) dissolves intirely the Ties of Conscience, which are the strongest Bonds of Society, and thereby turns Men loose from the Restraint and Protection of Laws, into all the Disorders of unrestrained Fraud and Rapine.

Let us return therefore to our general Enquiry. We have supposed that a Nation, wholly void of all Sense of Religion, may, peradventure, hit upon the most excellent Form of Government and Laws imaginable: And now in looking after fit Magistrates, to put these Rules and Laws in Execution, we have seen in some measure
what

what kind of Officers are necessary, and what sort of Failures those Officers are obnoxious to. In short, whatever other Virtues may be useful, in the Discharge of those Trusts; That, without which all the rest would become not only useless, but hurtful, is Integrity. A Man that has not a Principle known and acknowledged by others to be capable of *influencing him in the * Dark*, is not fit to be intrusted with any thing capable of being hid from Witnesses: That is, in plain Terms, not with any thing at all, of Moment. For throughout all the parts of the Administration of any Government,

* *Quid faciet is homo in tenebris qui nihil timet nisi Testem? Quid in deserto loco, nactus quem multo arduo spoliare possit imbecillum atq; solum? Cic. de Leg. l. i.*

there

there occur frequent Opportunities of perverting the Ends of it, secretly, to evil purposes. Now what security can that Man, who makes open Profession of the Principles of Irreligion, give unto the Publick, of his Fidelity in any Trust, where there is a possibility of perverting the Ends of it without Discovery? An Oath is the most usual and highest Pledge of this kind, that Mankind are yet acquainted withall. But will this Man, who proclaims his Disbelief of the Animadversion of a Deity, pretend to deserve any Degree of Credit upon account of his attesting a Name, (*God*) which in his Mouth is an empty Sound, without any signification? It
would

would be ridiculous either for him to offer himself, or for a Government to receive him, to the Solemnity of an Oath. Thus he makes himself an useless Member of the Society he is in : And if the whole Society entertained the same Principles, it must unavoidably dissolve and fall into Confusion. For, let us examine further ; What is it that can influence any Man in secure Secrecy ? Honour, and Shame, and Humane Laws of any kind, have there no place : Because no body sees. Only Interest sticks close to every Man, every where. Whatsoever is advantageous, or any way delightful to any one, operates constantly upon every one ; And (when nothing intervenes

68 A L E T T E R

venes to check it) irresistibly. Thus then, a Man secure of absolute Secrecy from all other Men, and having no Apprehension of any Invisible Being super-intending him, must of necessity pursue his own private Satisfaction. Natural Appetite, and present Interest, prompt him to it: No Prospect of any Repugnant Interest, at a Distance, makes him hesitate: No inward sense of Law or Duty restrains him: (For what can be called either Law or Duty, where no Superiour animadverts with Punishment; Nor does any Natural Advantage, as a Reward, attend the Action it-self?) Nothing from without interposes: (For all Humane Animadversion is excluded:)

cluded :) He must therefore pursue it : He can do no otherwise. At least, if in those circumstances he neglect to do it ; He in that acts not only * *foolishly*, but contrary to that general Inclination (the Desire of our own Good) which is by Nature made the Spring that moves all Mankind.

And thus (I say) the Observation of all civil Governments may convince any one, that is not wilfully blind, that the Decay of Integrity, and the Reason of that Decay, Irreligion, is the true and never failing Cause of Ruin in all Societies. I say again, Integrity : For that

* *Nullum est jus naturale. Itaq; omnes animantes, ipsâ ducente naturâ, commoda sua defendunt : Et ideo Justitia, si alienis utilitatibus consulat, suas negligat, Stultitia est dicenda. Lact. ex Cic. de Rep. l. 3.*

70 A LETTER

is the Virtue that I lay the stress upon. The Neglect, the Fraud, the Corruption, the Treachery, that any where run through all the course of a mis-managed State, proceed evidently, from want of Integrity. And the Consequence of that is so fatal, that neither Courage nor Skill can bear up under it. Where no body, or but very few, make Conscience of their Ways; Where a superficial specious shew is all that is endeavoured after towards the Publick, whilst Private Interest (unchecked by any inward Remorse) is the Private Measure of every Man's Conduct; What can follow but utter Destruction? It is apparent that every where, by the same Degrees that

that a sense of the Essential Grounds of Religion decay, Men's Virtue vanishes, their Morals corrupt, their very Natures degenerate, and their Government tends inevitably to Dissolution.

If this Decay of Religion (mistake me not, I do not mean blind Devotion, or superstitious Ceremony, but) if the little sense of the Super-intendency of a Deity, which is the general ground of all Religion, be not the occasion of the Decay of Integrity, I desire any one to shew me what is. Or rather, if the Cause of this Effect be too perplex'd or hidden, I desire them to shew me what is capable of curing it. That would be a Work worthy not
D only

only of a true Patriot, but of a Genuine Citizen of the World. Let any one that goes about it, examine the Principles of Humane Nature, and (removing that sense of Religion which I require) tell me what Notion, what Thing it is, that can be of Force enough to sway all Mankind, in absolutely secure Privacy, to deny themselves the enjoyment of any offered Satisfaction. Good Nature, and the Love of our Brethren, is the plausiblest Offer towards it that I can imagine. Some few, perhaps, having been educated from their Infancy in good-natur'd Principles, may find such an habitual force of that Love in their own Breasts as may seem natural to them.

But

But if they will say those Principles have the same Strength in all Men, they deny manifest Experience, and deserve no Answer. The savage *Africans* and *Americans*, who have been otherwise educated, (Or rather who, for want of Education, would be the only proper Instances in our Enquiry,) are undeniable Demonstrations of the Contrary. And if these few Good-natur'd Persons should go about to destroy the Belief of those things which are only capable to maintain the Societies of Mankind in any tolerable Degree of Happiness, without substituting any thing at all, either more or less, in the place of it; What shall we say of them? Do they not evidently

74 A L E T T E R

contradict the Character they pretend to? Is That Good Nature, which is charitable perhaps to some few Persons in distress, who lie within the narrow Sphere of this or that Man's Acquaintance; And at the same time, breaking the only Reins that are capable to restrain the ill Nature of others, let loose the whole Herd of Mankind, to an unbridled freedom of destroying and devouring one another? I blush to think, that so high a Degree of Good Nature, as I have here supposed some may be endowed withall, should be the occasion of producing such ill-natur'd Consequences. What Tyrant, what *Nimrod*, what *Caligula*, did ever the Ten-thousandth part of
Mischief

Mischief to Mankind, as would be the rooting out of that only Principle which is capable of maintaining any sure Amity amongst them? There is no proportion between these Mischiefs. Let these Pretenders therefore to Good-Nature either be content with that Principle of Religion, which has hitherto produced whatever is to be found of lasting Union and Constancy in the Societies of the World; Or let them furnish us with something better instead of it; Or let us, at least, beware of their Principles, as the most pernicious Venom that could possibly be instill'd into any Society, even by direct Enemies of Mankind.

If now, upon this whole Enquiry, we observe, That where ever the Principles of Irreligion are spread, in proportion to their increase, Integrity has decay'd; How for want of Integrity the strength of any Constitution of State is weakened; What a disorderly and uneasie Estate Men grow into; And what further Confusion and even Ruin constantly attends it; I say if this be every where observable; And we need not go far to be convinc'd of it, even in Countries where the general Principles of Religion (tho' decaying) are not yet quite extinguished; What can we conclude must be the Condition of a People that is wholly, in every particular Member
and

and Part, devoid of any such Principle at all? For that is the Supposition we are to take along with us: And our Enquiry is, how a People that believe no Super-intendency of an invisible Power, nor think themselves accountable (either here or hereafter) to any Judge but the Magistrate, can maintain any such order of Government amongst themselves, as is capable in any moderate Degree to make their Lives Secure, Easie, and Comfortable. Amongst this People, it is plain, there can not be one single virtuous Person, that is so upon a Principle suited to the general Nature of Mankind. And those that are so only by some peculiar Excellency of their own

78 *A* LETTER

Natural inclination, not common to others, are not to be taken into Consideration: Because Their number is every where too small to be of any weight. Their personal Qualifications may be what they will, and deserve very high personal Esteem: But I think nothing can properly be called Social Virtue (which is the thing we now enquire after) that the main Body of a Society is incapable of having any sense of. I conclude therefore that such a People must needs be very unfit to maintain any Rules of Society with one another. What? Where there is not one honest, one virtuous Man in a Government; (For I count none so, nor will

will any be found so at a stress, that have not a Principle which all Men own to be capable of making them so in the Dark; And that I am sure Those have not, who are utterly void of all Religion) Can, There, be any Consistency or Stability in that Government? Methinks there should not. But, especially, can a Government, amongst such Men, be more equal, and more secure, than amongst those who act upon a Principle capable (if followed) to make all Men Virtuous? This is an Absurdity unsufferable. Yet this the Men that I write of, those that say Religion is useless, and that Humane Laws alone suffice to maintain Order and Peace and Security in Humane Societies,

This (I say) they must assert ;
Or else acknowledge, that in
undermining the Grounds of
all Religion , they themselves
act more contrary to the gene-
ral Int'rest of all Mankind, than
any thing that humane Imagi-
nation can compare them to.

If, now, I have given any
competent Evidence, both from
Reason and Experience, that
Religion is (not only) no in-
different thing , insignificant
and useless to the Ends of Go-
vernment ; But that (in Effect)
it is so highly necessary and
useful, that it is impossible any
Government should subsist
without it ; And that whatever
Motives may force Men into
Societies (Conveniency , Pro-
tection, or whatsoever else they
be)

be) it is only the Belief of a Deity, and the consequence of that Belief, Religion, that makes a Ciment capable of uniting those Societies in any manner of Stability; (Which, I hope, I have in good measure performed) Then, methinks, I need say very little in answer to those that pretend Religion is not only useless, but hurtful. If it be useful, as I have proved; It can not be hurtful: For those Terms are contradictory; And cannot be said, in the same respect, of the same thing. Let us examine therefore if in any Respect whatsoever, we can find this prejudicial Tendency of Religion to the Int'rest of Society. *It is apt (the Objectors say) to fill Men's Minds with*

with Anxieties, Doubts, and Fears; Which debase their Spirits, perplex their Thoughts, and render them unfit for Business.

But whoever considers impartially, will find that whatsoever there is of Ill, in all these Anxieties, Doubts, Fears, Lowness of Spirit, and Perplexity of Thoughts, it proceeds wholly from the neglect of Religion, and by no means from the strict Observance of the Duties that it requires: And on the other side, that whatsoever Confidence, Boldness, and Security of Mind, springs from Atheism or Irreligion, it is only a Boldness in doing Evil; Which at the highest is subject to many Qualms; Or, tho' it were perfect in its kind, That surely cannot

not be pleaded by any one in favour of those Principles. But, however, He that discharges faithfully the Duties that are incumbent upon him, cannot possibly, in that, have any Anxiety at all. His whole Care is * *Conscientiously* imployed in doing the thing that is required of him, with *the same exactness as if it were before a Multitude of Witnesses*: Because he knows he is continually under the † *Inspection of an All-seeing God*. And having done that, he has ‖ *Boldness* both towards God

* *Nihil Opinionis causâ, omnia Conscientia faciam, Populo spectante fieri credam, quicquid me conscio faciam. — Patriam meam esse Mundum sciam, & praesides Deos supra me circa; me stare, Factorum Dictorumq; Censores. Senec. de Beata Vita, c. 20.*

† *Magna vobis necessitas incumbit Probitatis, cum degatis sub oculis Judicis omnia cernentis. Boet. de Consol. Ph.*

‖ — *Hic murus aeneus esto, Nil conscire sibi, nulla pallescere culpa. Hor. Epist. l. 1.*

and

and towards Man. There may happen indeed many Occasions, in the ordinary Course of Humane Affairs, in which this Man may be fearful, and unwilling to proceed. But what are those Occasions? From whence comes this Fear? The Occasions are, when he is required by Unreasonable and Tyrannical Superiours, to be the Instrument of Violence and Wrong. In those Occasions, indeed, he fears: He fears to offend God: And therefore he hesitates; draws back; and is altogether unfit for this sort of Business. But imploy him in any thing that makes for the true Welfare of his Country; (and much more, if for the Welfare of Mankind) And see with

with what Resolution and Intrepidity he will face the Opposers of it. No Lion more bold than He, in a Righteous Cause. Or if yet it should be objected, that Lowness of Spirit, Meekness, and Humility, which are the Consequences of a Religious Temper, are too contrary to this Martial Courage that I now hint at; Then however I reply: So much the rather let us study to improve that Temper. What will be the Effect of it; suppose the whole World should become thus religious? Nobody would injure, no body would hurt one another: We should all live together, as Brethren, in Peace and Friendship. And what's the Harm? Is it for fear
of

of this Mischief, that Men endeavour to destroy the Seeds, and extirpate the Roots of all Religion? God forbid.

Another Objection against Religion (the last that I intimated before, and all of any moment that I can yet think of) is, *That the Dread of an Avenging Deity inclines Men to Superstition*: And Superstition, of some Kinds and in some Degrees, I have allowed may produce as ill, or even worse consequences than absolute Irreligion. How shall we answer this? Very easily. The Root of Superstition lies in the false Ideas that Men frame to themselves of God: Not in the true ones. Those that consider his Power, may indeed think it
rea.

reasonable to fear him : But those that consider also his Wisdom and Goodness, must of necessity love him. From the mixture of these two Effects, proceed Respect, Reverence, and Adoration. And when the grounds of all (infinite Wisdom, Goodness, and Power) are stedfastly kept in mind, it is impossible that those who are deeply penetrated with that sense, can condescend to any way of expressing it (which is outward Worship) unsuitable to his Excellencies; And much less, to any Practice towards their Neighbours (wherein lies the danger of Society) directly contrary to his Laws. Thus, true Religion secures all. It is false Religion only that breeds
any

any Danger. And even that Danger too, tho' it may be very great in some particular Instances, yet it does not oft extend it self (as Irreligion) to the extirpating and utter Ruin of Society, in the Nations of the World. I have hinted already at the dreadfullest Effects of Superstition that I could think of : Humane Sacrifices, and Persecution. 'Tis the last of these that, in this Age of the World, it most concerns us to enquire into : And I am far from going about to extenuate the Heinousness of that Practice. But yet I think I may truly say, that the Root of Persecution does not lie very much in bare Superstition. Take away the Interest, I mean the worldly Interest,

t'rest, that Irreligious Men have in persecuting others; Let not those Incendiaries blow up the Zeal of Bigots into a Flame, against those that differ from them either in Opinion or Practice, and their Heats will be tempered without coming to Fire and Faggot. Superstition alone, if ill-natur'd irreligious Int'rest were not interwoven with it, would no more disturb the Peace of Societies, at this Day, than it did in the Days of Ancient Paganism. Not at all. That is too obvious to need any further Illustration. But take it at the worst; That Superstition is the sole Cause of Persecution, and of all the Mischiefs attending it: What is the Cure of this Evil? Certainly

tainly not to root up the Grounds of all Religion; But to cultivate the true ones.

If therefore it should be found that any Set of Men, even tho' they were Priests, (of whatsoever Form) industriously applied themselves to delude Mankind, with Notions suitable to their own particular Int'rest; but contrary to the general Welfare of Societies; Let those that have the Talent declaim against their Villainy, expose their Hypocrisie, and by all imaginable Arts render those that are guilty as contemptible, ignominious, and even odious in the Eyes of the World, as such combined Enemies of Mankind deserve to be. In this, my Heart, and Hand too

too (if it were able) should go along with them. Only let no body involve the Innocent with the Guilty. In that, there ought to be great scrupulosity, and exact Care. For such Transgressions are hainous Immoralities. But, within this Restriction, of not involving the Innocent with the Guilty; Nothing can be too strong, nor too severe, against such Doctrines and Practices as tend to the Corruption of Men's Minds, the Inslaving of their Persons, and the Ruin of Societies. And when I allow this Liberty, in these Bounds; I not only confine it strictly to these Bounds, but extend it indifferently to whatsoever exceeds them. And, that no body may mistake my mean-

meaning, I further add, in the first place, that (considering the Frailty of Humane Nature, and the Shortness of our Capacities) it seems to me highly reasonable, that All manner of Opinions, even tho' Mistakes, about Religion, which spring from Weakness, Tenderneſs, and Simplicity of Heart, and have nothing in them of that Evil Tendency which I have now hinted at, ſhould be indulged and treated with all the ſweetneſs imaginable. For what conceivable Right can any one have, to treat thoſe otherwiſe, who are really within the Bounds of this Reſtriction? None at all. And, in the next place, I would have our Nominal Deists (on the other ſide)

side) understand, that whilst they continue to undermine the Grounds of all Religion, They themselves deserve all that Severity, which they will think I have with Justice allowed them against the Perverters of the True; And which they are always ready to take, even in too great a Latitude.

I think I have now succinctly answered the Substance of all that is most commonly, and most plausibly, objected against Religion in general; And may from hence conclude, that the Ideas we entertain of a Deity (and which, if we allow the use of our Reason, every thing will inforce upon us) are no indifferent thing, even to the Welfare of Mankind in this World.

World. A God that either does not, or can not, interpose in our Concerns, is to us an Empty Name, and signifies nothing. And without the Belief of an interposing or animadverting God, it is impossible that any Model of Government can be supported. This the wise *Athenians* were so sensible of, that they banished *Protagoras*, as dangerous to their State, not for denying, but for doubting of it. And the Reason (as has been discoursed already) is plain. For Int'rest undeniably governs the main course of Humane Actions. We are so framed by Nature, that it can not be otherwise. And without that Belief, no Man has any Int'rest
to

to be virtuous, further than in outward Appearance only. The Shew alone, of Benignity and Good-will to Mankind, not only avoids the Reach of Humane Laws, but suffices to procure the Good-will of those who see nothing but that Shew. Where a private Advantage can be gained, without hazard of Discovery, if Religion be removed, nothing hinders. And is that Man virtuous, who is so only in Appearance, either for fear of the Law, or for the sake of his Reputation? I can not call him so. But call him what we will, I think I have made it evident that no Government can subsist, where no Member of it has any more powerful Principle of Virtue than this:

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And

And that without Government no tolerable Degree of Security, Peace, and Happiness in this World can be attained.

After this, methinks I should need few words to perswade you, Gentlemen, (who are *Deists* indeed) to renounce the Fraternity of those who (lurking under the Cover of that Name) go about secretly undermining the Welfare of all Mankind. Whatever Humanity may be shewn to their Persons (as That indeed ought in no occasion whatsoever to be omitted) there is no Indulgence due to their Opinions. To smile at, and take complacence, in the bold strokes, which in daily Conversation they give at the Root of all Religion, is to be delighted

delighted with the Ruin of all Humane Society. How barbarous! I am sure, none that in reality believes a God can endure it. Let us therefore be always upon our Guard, and in all occasions discountenance and oppose their pernicious Principles.

The Task of opposing them is not difficult. Examine but the ground of any one of their Systems, and it will be found to be built upon such intolerable Presumption, as one would think they themselves should blush to own. *Is it because of any Disorders they observe in the Universe, that they conclude it not to have been formed by an Intelligent Workman? What! His bungling, perhaps, is observable*

*v*able (as one said) in placing the Calves of our Legs behind; Whereas they ought rather to have been before, for the Defence of our Skins. Frothy Impertinence! Anatomists will tell them the indispensable Use of those Muscles which compose our Calves, in that very place. But, how dare Men be so bold to carp at what they are not able to mend; nay, nor in the least degree to imitate? O, but, say they, *an infinitely Wise and Powerful God* (as we suppose him) *could have framed a more perfect Creature than Man is.* And who has told them that he has not done it? Nay, numberless Varieties of such Creatures, suited to the various Disposition of those
Parts

Parts of the Universe where he has placed them? We have no reason, I am sure, to think our selves in the highest Stage of Nature. *But whatever be our Natural Condition; Our Moral Circumstances (upon the supposition of the Grounds of Religion) they will say, ought to have been much otherwise. He ought to have given us a greater strength of Mind, to bridle those Appetites, for the Disorders of which it is pretended he will judge us. But if he thought fit, amongst the great variety of Creatures that fill the Universe, to create us in a state of Indifferency and Freedom, not so strongly sway'd any way, as to be necessarily and unavoidably either Happy or Miserable;*

What Irregularity is there in this? What Breach of Symmetry do we make in the Universe? Especially, if he have given us a strength sufficient for the working out of our own happiness (which is the Case) and we apply not our selves to make use of it; What reason have we to complain of his Judgment? *Yes; The Judgment ordinarily believ'd, is too severe.* Let us suspend our Judgment of That, till we come to it. Our ordinary Ideas of a Deity are, that he is both Just and Merciful: And the temperature that must result from the combination of those two Dispositions, will undoubtedly be such as we shall be forced to own proper and suitable to our Circum-

cumstances. No, say they again, all manner of Punishment will be then unsuitable: Because it will neither tend to our Reformation, nor serve for Example to others: Without which it is no better than meer Revenge, and would be unjustifiable even amongst Men. All of a piece still. Who told them that we shall not be capable of any degrees of Purification in another Life; Or that none of the Inhabitants of those Regions, whither we shall be transported, will be capable of receiving any Benefit by our Example? The same Thread of Presumption runs through the whole Series of these Objections. The Offer of any (even the least) of them implies a

pretence to a full and comprehensive knowledge of the whole Universe. For That is visibly one intire Frame, knit together, without the least Chasm, by continual Relations and Dependencies. And whoever objects against any part, if he really pretend to understand the whole, ought to blush at his own Presumption: Or if he object, without pretending to it, He must needs (in the Judgment of all Men) incur the Censure of great Extravagance.

I said in the beginning, that I intended not to oppose these Opinions, in this Paper, by any Philosophical Arguments: Because that has been sufficiently done, over and over again, by many others. It is sufficient to
me,

me, that I shew the ground-
lessness of all of them, by the
impossibility of any Man's be-
ing able to have a due compe-
tency of Knowledge whereon
to build them. And the same
Presumption that runs through
all the Objections drawn up
against the Wisdom of God,
from the imperfections and dis-
orders that are pretended to be
observed in the World, will be
found in like manner to be
the root of all those that are
brought against his Providence.
That Great One, *drawn from
the Prosperity of Ill Men, and the
Adversity which oft times at-
tends the Good, in this Life,* is
visibly of the same Nature. For
who has assured the Objectors
that This is not a probationary

State; And that all such irregularities will be set even hereafter? They must be very presumptuous, to say, that a Future state for Humane Souls is impossible. And yet That they must say, or else their Objection is vain, The improbability and doubtfulness of any thing is not a sufficient Ground for a Positive Conclusion. They must talk no less than of perfect Knowledge in the Matter, or they talk very impertinently. I know not whether they do so or no; But I am sure their Confidence is as great as if they did. What Presumption!

Methinks those that on all occasions extoll so much the Ancients, who were unacquainted

ted with Revelation, should not think a thing so very impossible which They all believed (at least) to be highly probable. For this I could easily bring numerous Authorities: But they are so commonly known, that I count it needless. Only one, tho' Modern, may not be improper; Because it asserts (as I do) the general authority of the Ancients; And more especially because of the Character of the Person who writes it. 'Tis the Lord *Herbert* of *Cherbury*, whom, I think, we may reckon a *Deist*, of our own number. In his Treatise, *De Religione Gentilium*, Chap. 15. under the Title, *Spes*; After a large Quotation out of *Plato* to the same pur-

purpose, he adds these words.
 * *As therefore the Gentiles worshipped the same God, and had the same esteem of Virtue, that we have; So 'tis certain that the same Hope of Immortality was common both to them and us. Cicero, l. 2. de Leg. says expressly, The Souls of all men are immortal, but those of the steddily Good are Divine: And, lib. de Senect. Death ought not to be grieved at, since Immortality follows it. So that (says the Lord Herbert again) amongst many religious Doctrines*

* *Quemadmodum igitur haut alius Deus, haut alia virtus, ab Gentilibus quam ab nostris olim colebatur, ita certe communis utrisq; Spes immortalitatis fuit. Desertim Cicero 2. de Leg. ait: Animi hominum sunt immortales, sed fortium Bonorum divini. Et alibi, in lib. de Senect. ait: Non est lugenda Mors, quum Immortalitas consequitur. Ut ideo inter complurima Gentilium religiosa dogmata hoc solidum axioma obtinuisse videatur: Ex virtute, nempe, homines in Spem Immortalitatis venire. Herb. de Reg. Gen. c. 15.*

of

of the Gentiles, This seems to have been esteemed by them as a solid uncontestable Axiome, viz. **That by the practice of Virtue, Men attain to the Hope of Immortality.** Thus I say, if either Reason or Authority have any weight, we must needs conclude, that intolerable Presumption lies at the Root of this Objection.

And if we consider yet another, to the same purpose, we shall still find the same thing. When they tell us, *That it is suitable to the Perfections of the Deity, to have made all things at first so compleat, as never to need his interposition afterwards; And that it is below his Dignity, or*
that

that it would * disturb his present Felicity, to intermeddle with our Affairs; What does this signifie, but that they think themselves capable of determining whatsoever may be suitable to Infinite Perfection? If in any thing they plainly saw a Necessity, well and good: But from their loose and groundless imaginations, to draw such a Conclusion, argues extream Arrogance. Does it argue a Perfection in the Divine Nature, to have excluded himself (by the perfection of

* *Omnis enim per se Divinus natura necesse est,
Immortali auro summâ cum pace fruatur,
Sèmotâ ab nostris rebus, sejunctaq; longè:
Nam privata dolore omni, privata periclis,
Ipsa suis pollens opibus, nil indiga nostri,
Nec bene promeritis capitur nec tangitur ira.*

Lucr. l. i.

Nos vocat exiguis rebus adesse Jovi. Ovid.

his

his Workmanship) from any possibility of ever more intermeddling with it? Can they be certain of this? I think not. And if it be possible for him to intermeddle, whensoever he sees convenient, how will they prove he does not? O, it would *discompose him, and disturb his perfect Happiness*. At this rate, he must be of a very delicate Constitution. His Head, perhaps, would ache, if he applied his Mind to such perplexing Cares. Ridiculous! Yet, admit it: What hinders but he may be discharged of much of that trouble, by the Ministry of Myriads of intellectual Beings, who may have ways of influencing us imperceptibly,

ceptibly, which we conceive not? Is this also impossible? They must either shew their Presumption (as I said before) in pronouncing it so; Or own their Temerity, in raising Objections without knowledge.

As impossible as the Doctrine of Providence may seem to them, This also is what all the wise and virtuous Heathens constantly believed; And upon which (as I have shewn already) they founded both their Morality and Politicks. Yet since I am saln again upon the Subject, I have a Mind to add one Passage more out of *Cicero*, and to join with That the Authority of *Socrates*, and
of

of *Antoninus* ; Two Names that (if any) deserve high Veneration. Concerning *Socrates*, *Xenophon* his Disciple, tells us, in the First Book of his *Memoirs*, that *He called those Madmen, who could imagine that all humane affairs depended intirely upon our Conduct, without any interposition of Divine Providence.* This is the Spirit that runs through all his Philosophy, and with which he tinctured every thing. *Xenophon* has given us several Argumentations of his, expressly to this purpose, which are much too long to be here transcribed. And these remarkable Words, in his Fourth Book, shew us the improvement he made of it for
the

the benefit of Humane Life. **What** Man in his **Wits** (says he) can, any other way, hope for greater Advantages, than from the Gods; in whose power it is to bestow on us the greatest? But he only has Right to expect such things from them who pleases them: And he chiefly pleases them who most perfectly obeys them. Thus (says *Xenophon*) whilst he both taught and practised these things, he made his Hearers more Pious and Moderate: And, consequently (all Men must own) more fit for the Duties of Society. I wish We, in following his Example, could work the same Effect upon our Nominal Brethren. The Passage of *Ci-
cero*

cero that I think worthy to be observed, is this. * *Who can be so void of all Understanding (says he) as Either, when he looks up into the Heavens, does not conclude that there are Gods; But imagines those things, which are contrived with so great Wisdom that scarce any Man is able with all his Art to attain to a knowledge of the Regular Vicissitudes of their Motions, to be all the Products of*

* *Enim qui tam vacuus, qui Aut cum suspensio in calum Deos esse non sentiat, & ea, qua tantum mente sunt ut vix quisquam arte ullâ ordinem rerum ac vicissitudinem persequi possit, casu fieri putet; Aut cum Deos esse intellexerit, non intelligat eorum Numine hoc tantum Imperium esse natum, & ætatum, & retentum? Qualem volumus, licet, P. C. nos amemus; Tamen nec numero Hispanos, nec robore Gallos, nec calliditate Persas, nec artibus Græcos, nec deniq; hoc ipso hujus gentis ac terra domesticæ nativæq; sensu Italos ipsos ac Latinos, sed pietate ac religione, atq; hac unâ sapientiâ quod Deorum immortalium Numine omnia regi gubernariq; perspeximus, omnes gentes nationesq; superavimus. Cicero. Orat. de Arusp. Resp,*

blind

blind Chance ; Or when he does perceive that there are Gods, does not understand that the very Origin, Growth, and Support of this Mighty Empire are to be ascribed to their Providence and Protection ? He goes on, strenuously asserting that, However they might flatter themselves, All their Successes, even the Conquest of the whole World, were not to be attributed either to their Number or Strength, &c. Nor even to their Understanding and Wisdom ; except it were in this one Point, that they excelled all other Nations in Piety and Religion, and in a sensible Conviction of the Superintendency of the Immortal Gods, and of their own intire Dependance upon them. But
I will

I will conclude these Authorities, with that of *Antoninus*. He positively affirms (l. 2. §. 8.) both *that there are Gods, and that they do concern themselves in the Administration of Humane Affairs*: And upon that ground, every where, maintains that they ought to be *Pray'd to, and Worshipped*. And accordingly (l. 3. §. 11.) in addressing his Reflections to himself (as his stile runs) He has these excellent words: *Prepare and furnish thy self with Rules, that may be useful to thee in the Intelligence both of Divine and Humane things: And in all thy Transactions, even the least, remember the Connexion that is between those two. For neither can any Humane Affair*

fair be performed as it ought, unless respect be had to the Gods, in the doing of it : Nor the Contrary. By which *Contrary*, according to the Curreant stream of his Philosophy, it is probable he intended to intimate; That as all Humane Affairs must be allow'd to be very irregular, where respect was not had to the Gods in the Conduct of them; So all religious performances towards the Gods ought to be accounted as improper, which did not tend to the advantage of Humane Society. I say, this I conclude from the Curreant Stream of his Philosophy; Because he professes often (l. 9. §. 17. and l. 10. §. 6.) *that he had no other sense of Duty, nor even of any parti-*

particular happiness to himself, than in the Tendency of every thing he either said or did, to the Welfare of that General Community of Mankind, unto which every particular Man is inseparably united, as a constituent part of the great Whole. And therefore also (l. 2. §. 14.) he calls that Man an *impostumous Boil*, and Excrecence in the World, who was capable of the consideration of any separate Int'rest. Which the Propagators of Opinions so ruinous to Society, as those I write against, would do well to take notice of.

Tis true, indeed, *Epicurus* (in his Doctrine of Providence) was of another Opinion. His business was to destroy all sense of any Dependance, upon the Gods,

118 A LETTER

Gods, in any case whatsoever. But I beg these Gentlemen's Pardon, if I did not reckon upon him, when I mentioned all the wise and virtuous Heathens as agreeing in this Belief. Not that I would detract from his Reputation of personal Moderation and Temperance, or any other Excellency that is reported of him. But the voluptuous and dissolute Lives of the main Body of his Followers, proving evidently the tendency of his Principles, makes me look upon him (if you please) as a Virtuous Monster ; If he were so, in consequence of a Belief which did, and naturally must, make the Generality of Men, who imbrace it, extreamly vicious.

Now,

Now, if the manifest Immodesty of those Objections, (founded upon vain Presumption, and contrary to the weight of all virtuous Authority) be not sufficient to check the Spreaders of them in our days; Yet, methinks, the ill Consequences that attend such like Doctrines, should not only do it, but also make them a little doubtful of their Truth. And if they were once got so far as to admit the Mischief of those Consequences, and thereupon to hesitate upon the Truth of the Notions which produced them, I cannot yet think so ill of my Countrymen, as to suppose they would continue their Industry in making Profelytes. The Consequences I have represented al-

F ready :

ready : *The Ruin of Societies.* Now suppose the Disquisition into the Truth of these Matters were intricate ; (for that is the most that can be said in favour of the Incredulous.) Which way ought we to incline ? He must have little Humanity in him that does not find even his Judgment sway'd by the Welfare of all Mankind. For my part, who do believe a God and Providence, I cannot conceive it consistent with his Goodness, to have put us into such Circumstances, that any Opinion which is absolutely necessary to our Being or Well-being (so that we could not possibly either be at all, or enjoy any competent happiness without it) should not be True ; Or that the contrary

trary should. This would be to suppose the Scheme of the Universe very ill drawn, and the Parts of it ill suited to each other; If any real and necessary Effect were made dependent upon an imaginary and false Cause. For Instance: If our Being, (the Sustenance of our Life) or the End of our Being, (Happiness, in any moderate degree) could not be attained without this or that particular Perswasion, which should move us to act in this or that particular manner; It would seem to me (I confess) very absurd, and inconsistent with my Idea of a God, that such Opinion or Perswasion should have no real Ground in the Nature of Things, but depend only upon

our lucky hitting on so useful an Error. That is as much as to say: If the Belief of God's Superintendency be absolutely necessary to our attaining any competent Degree of Happiness (which he has evidently designed us for) it seems to me very absurd, to think that such a Belief can possibly be groundless and false. This would give me a strange Idea both of God and of my self. If every thing that I can observe in my own Nature, shews me that I am designed for Society; And if Society can not possibly be maintained without those Principles that I have been pleading for; I must needs think it a very fantastical Contrivance in my Nature, if the Author of it

it should have no way to lead me into the Belief of them, but by Delusion : Especially if that Delusion be such, (which is the Case in the System of those I now dispute against) as I myself may be able to detect, and thereby frustrate the End of him that made me. This (I must needs say) would make so strange a jumble in my Brains, that, rather than admit it, I should fly to direct Scepticism, and believe nothing at all. Yet nevertheless, I confess, All this does not amount to a Demonstration, to those who do not believe a God, or not such a God as I do; Tho' to me it be not much less. At least, I must profess that, admitting the Matter of Fact (in

respect of the Consequences of Irreligion) as I have endeavoured to prove it; The grounds of Religion do, by this very Argument, appear to me so probable, that tho' I had no other, I should not scruple to venture my All upon them. Nature her self repugns at the Thought of the Contrary. Who is it, that would not abhor any thing that tends to the Ruin of his whole Species? Methinks, therefore, it should create in all Men's Minds a prejudice strong enough to resist even very specious Arguments; But surely, to hinder the Belief of so ill a thing, without any Argument at all. And, as even now, I called him a Monster of Virtue, who could be virtuous in spight
of

of the strongest vicious Principles; So I would fain know by what Stile those Men will decipher their own Inhumanity, who can (without any reluctance) entertain and take Delight in propagating Opinions which strike at the Foundation of all Humane Happiness.

Let this suffice to be said concerning the Nominal *Deists*. I would now add a few words to you, Gentlemen, that are Real ones; And to my self, in that number. We do believe, That *there is an infinitely Powerful, Wise, and Good God; Who superintends the Actions of Mankind, in order to retribute unto every one, either here or hereafter, according to their Deserts.* Let no body boggle at this Creed: For if

we do not stick to it, I have proved already that we ruin the Foundation of all Humane Happiness, and are in effect no better than meer *Atheists*: And, in the end of the Consequence shall become *Canibals*. If we do stick to it, let us consider what further it leads us to. The Retribution that we have concluded to be necessary, is not made with any manner of exactness in this Life: And therefore it is to be expected in another. This, indeed, is a common Argument: But admitting the Premises, I do not see how it can be resisted. Those that will oppose it, must begin with denying the Superintendency of God; And thereby declare themselves Enemies of Man.

Mankind. But let us go on. If God superintend the Actions of Men, he does it by some Rule. That Rule must of necessity be Uniform. That is; All Men in the same Circumstances must be obliged to the same thing, under the same Penalty. For Partiality, Favour, and Dispensation, to one person more than another, are wholly inconsistent with our Ideas of his Perfections. But when Circumstances alter, tho' the Rule it-self be always the same, God's Judgment of particular Actions alters accordingly. It may then be enquired, how shall we do to know what this Uniform Rule is? I answer; It must of necessity be suitable to the Relation that is between him and us. If that

will not teach us what it is, I shall be at a loss where to look for it. But let us consider what appears most obvious in the General Relation wherein God stands to Men; Or Men to God. Whether we call him Creator, Benefactor, Governour, or whatever it be, it is one and the same thing to All: He is not the God of this or that particular Country only, but of the whole World. This General Relation, therefore, implies a General Care. His Design must of necessity be the Good of the whole. And as we are Instruments in his hand, it must certainly be in order to that End. Whatsoever tends to the Good of the whole, is therefore (in every change of Circumstance) the
Constant

Constant, Uniform, and Unalterable Duty that God requires from every Man; And according to which he will judge every Man. Thus we both find what our Duty is; And that his Animadversion, to be expected in a Future State, gives it the Strength of a Law.

I say, therefore, Gentlemen, let us that believe and see these things, be careful to conform our Lives according thereunto. This is no small Advance. If we keep fast hold of this Thread, there can happen very few Difficulties that it will not guide us through. The Awe of a superintending God, if attended to, will make us Sincere. For where is the Man, that whilst he is under that Sense, dares transgress
the

the Laws that he understands himself to be in this manner obliged to observe? And if we are Sincere, there is no Man of moderate Capacity, but by asking himself the Question, on occasion of any thing that he is going about (*Which way would it be for the Advantage of all Mankind, that all Men in this Circumstance, should act?*) will be able to see, which way lies the General Int'rest of Mankind; And in that, His own particular Duty.

This would furnish Matter for a large Discourse: But that I fear it would be called Preaching. Yet what is obvious, and necessary, must not be omitted. Let us open our Eyes, and consider what a World we should have,

have, if all Men were thorowly sensible but of this one thing, that I have now Illustrated. This one Law, if every Man carried it in his Breast, would very much supersede the Use of all other. But without that which is the Ground of This, all other Laws are of very little significancy. What the state of the World would be, in that case, we have seen already. Let us not therefore delude our selves, or others, with Talk of Reformation. Till this Principle be spread, has taken root, and is got in Vogue, 'tis altogether in vain to go about it. This, and this alone, will reach the Decay of Trade and Wealth, (not to mention the higher effects of it) and reform the Miscarriages that are
com-

complained of in Publick Affairs, and Establish the Government of this Nation. I speak of Government, because I believe many of us do (I am sure all should) heartily love our Country ; The Welfare of which depends intirely upon the Constitution and Administration of our Government. What Reformation ; What Patchings of our shattered Frame, can we expect ? Nay, *What will any Patchings * signifie, whilst our Manners are thus corrupted ?* Till a Principle of True Virtue begin to take Root in Men's Minds, there is nothing more Chimerical than the Expectation of any

* *Quid Leges, sine Moribus, vana proficiunt ?* Hor. Carm. l. 9. Ode 24.

manner of Publick Good. And I think I may well add, that there is hardly any *Cant* more fulsome, than the Talk of Virtue, where there is not a Principle that all Men must own capable to produce it. For our Country's sake therefore, Gentlemen, let us make it our first Business, to establish this Principle in the Minds of all our Acquaintance. We may do it in a thousand Ways, more effectual than the Pedantick forms of Pulpit-speeches; And which will disbecome no body. This were an excellent means indeed of tricking the Priests out of their Trade (which we so much exclaim against) and would leave them no ground of Complaint. When we have done this, (and
not

134 A LETTER

not till then) we may set up for Patriots; And with Assurance of Success. One that was no more Bigot than the best of us, saw many Ages ago, and told his Countrymen, the *Romans*, that all their * *Successes were to be attributed to their Religious Reverence of the Gods, and their Miscarriages, to the neglect and decay of it.* And whether we seek the reason of this Observation in the Natural Efficacy of the grand Principle of Religion, or in the Blessing of Providence that attends the observance of it, we shall find it both ways strong. Let us then make it our Business

* *Diis te minorem quod geris imperas: Huc omne Principium, huc refer exitum. Diis multa neglecti dederunt Hesperia mala luctuosa.* Hor. Car. lib. 1. Ode 6.

to || *Propagate the Establishment of True Religion*; And we shall by that means, not only *root up the Weeds of Superstition* (wherever we meet with any such) but lay a solid Foundation of Prosperity to our Country, for which Posterity will pronounce us Blessed.

Now if what I have offered, towards the Establishment of a General Rule of Conduct, be of any use; I would very earnestly * beg of those that are more able than my self, to improve it further; and to give us a System of particular Duties that Rise naturally from

|| *Quamobrem, ut Religio propaganda est qua est juncta cum cognitione Naturæ, sic Superstitionis stirpes omnes elidenda sunt. Cic. de Divin. l. 2.*

* — *Fungar vice cotis, acutum Reddere quæ ferrum valet exors ipsa secandi. Hor. de Art. Po.*

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the Fountain of True Deism. *Grotius* indeed, and *Pufendorf*, and many other Moralists and Politicians, have done something towards it; but either so brokenly, or so diffusedly, that it is hard for a Reader to perceive always the Thread of Consequences which ought to run through the whole. Something more easie and more evident is yet wanting. It has been hinted by a * Worthy Gentleman, that *Morality is capable of Demonstration*. And all that have read that Work of his, will allow that none can be more capable of doing it than himself. If I had the honour, therefore, of his Acquain-

* *Leake*, concerning Humane Understanding, 1. 3. cap. 4.

tance,

rance, I would certainly solicit him to perform what he proposes. But since we see it not yet done, and must therefore suppose that some other thing of no less moment employs his Thoughts (for he has both there, and * else-where, express'd too true a Concern for the Welfare of Mankind, to leave us any mistrust that he would otherwise omit it) I cannot refrain from offering to all Men's consideration the Usefulness of the Design; That so whoever finds his Strength equal to the Task, may take it upon him.

But if the Difficulty of this Work be any Obstacle to others, as well as to me; And if my

* His Thoughts concerning Education.

138 A LETTER

General Rule be too succinct, for the Variety of Cases that occur in Humane Affairs; Then I am sure we must all conclude that the generality of Mankind stand in great need of some further Assistance, than that general Capacity which they are naturally endowed with: And that wheresoever that Assistance can be found, it is not below the most elevated Capacity to make use of it. Now this, at least, is pretended, amongst Christians, to have been done by the Revelation of Jesus Christ. The Precepts of the Gospel are plain, suited to the meanest Capacities: And, if the History of it be true, the Divine Authority of it can not be questioned.

sioned. Those two things, therefore, joined together, ease us at once of the trouble of enquiring into the Foundation of the Law of Nature, and into the Particularities of it. For admitting them; We have a fair Transcript, in our hands, of the most essential Points of that Law, and the Authority of the Law-giver stamp'd upon it. This therefore, besides the Doctrine of Deism that we agree in, it highly concerns us to enquire into. For if the pretences of Christianity be well grounded, it can not be an indifferent or frivolous Matter.

The general Advice that I will presume to offer upon this account, is only this. Let us
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be very careful not to block up our own way to the Discovery of any useful Truth, by that sort of Presumption which I have but even now * condemned in those whose Brotherhood I would disclaim. I hope none that really believes a God, will offer to say it is *impossible* for him to communicate the knowledge of his Will to his Creatures, by any other way than that which we are ordinarily acquainted withal: Or that it is *impossible* for Him to impower any one, whom he thinks fit to fill with any extraordinary either Degree or Kind of Knowledge, to work things so wonderful as may

* —Eheu, Quàm temerè in nosmet legem sancimus iniquam! Hor. Sat. 1, 1.

justly

justly be esteemed an adequate proof of his extraordinary Mission. To pronounce either of these, dogmatically, *impossible*, implies a presumption of so comprehensive and universal a knowledge, as I am sure it is impossible for any Man to attain to. *Impossible* for God ! Is the thing inconsistent with the Scheme of the Universe ? Who knows it ? If it be not ; Or that we are ignorant ; Who dares say it ? But if we can not reasonably pronounce all manner of extraordinary Revelation of God's Will to be impossible ; And can not deny some extraordinary Help (considering the many frailties of Humane Nature) to be highly useful ; We are certainly bound to examine
with-

142 A LETTER

without prejudice, and very impartially, any thing that has but a plausible pretence to that Extraordinary Character.

It will not be denied, I suppose, but Christianity has the fairest Pretensions to this, of any Religion now in the World. Yet even here, immediately, we renconter a Cloud of Objections: Superstitious Practices; Absurd and unconceivable Tenets; Disputes; Uncertainties; and Endless Difficulties. What shall we do? Think not, Gentlemen, that I am going to advise you to enter into all the Controversial Disquisitions that amuze our several Sects. No: If you are desirous to know the Truth, avoid them all, and enquire without prejudice into the

the Root of the Matter. The Root I call the plain History of Matter of Fact. See what Proofs there are, for or against the Truth of what is recorded to have been said and done by Jesus Christ. If you can not deny the Truth of the History (which I suppose is hardly possible) then observe the Tendency of his Doctrines and Precepts; And if you find them all intirely conducing to the Welfare of Mankind; (which is the same End with that of the Natural Law of God) Believe them not the less; (I beseech you) But think yourselves a little the more obliged to obey them, because (which you must own, if the History be true) he was immediately

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144 A LETTER

sent from God to teach and give them. In this Examination, the Use of our Reason is not only Lawful, but Necessary. God has given it to us, as Men, for our Use: And where we apply it to necessary Uses, not to vain Curiosities, it will not deceive us. In that manner we act according to Nature, and ought not to do otherwise. And if we examine thus, I am perswaded we shall find that Christianity is the highest Improvement of Deism: So that we may embrace it, without forsaking our first Principles. It must needs be so, if true. For the Principles of Deism are the Eternal and Unalterable Law of God to all Men. He may give further
 Helps

Helps (as I suppose we shall find Christianity is) to some: But he can not Abrogate or Suspend the Universal Law, which he has given us by Nature, with respect to any. My Counsel therefore terminates, in sticking constantly close to That; And at the same time, in making Use of all the Assistance we can find, for the Improvement of it, any where else. In this manner we not only avoid, but answer all the Objections that I now hinted at, or that can possibly rise against Christianity. The Practice of Superstitions is unsuitable to the true Idea of a God. The Belief of Absurdities is impossible to the Nature of Man. And the Enquiry into

146 A LETTER

Useless Niceties, is a very ill Employment of that precious time, of which (amongst other things) God will certainly require an account at our hands.

How! Will some Sectaries, that may chance to see this Letter, be apt to say; *Are no Systems, no Articles, no Creeds, worth enquiring into? This is to set up a New Christianity, and to Undermine what is ordinarily called by that Name, instead of establishing it: The very Fault that you condemned in those who, under the Veil of Deism, made it their Business to propagate the Principles of Atheism.* I beg their Pardon. The Difference is great. In the first place: 'Tis to Deists I write. And if upon that account, I
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use a Latitude in some Expressions, not suited to the Genius of a Sectary, 'tis no more than the nature of the thing requires. But I will answer them more directly. They may wrangle about Names as much as they please: 'Tis the thing only that I enquire into. *Christianity*. That Christianity which *Jesus Christ* and his Apostles taught: Not that which Sects and Parties have so deformed, or disguised, that it is not at all knowable in their Writings, nor much in their Practice. What! Shall I set myself to seek out a System of Christianity, amongst their endless Disputes? Let them first agree upon it amongst themselves. When that is done, it

will be time enough for me to consider what they say. But if, in the mean while, I can find out any particular wherein they all agree, I sincerely promise them that I will stick to it.

Now one particular, I bless God, I have lately found, in a Book, Intituled, *The Reasonableness of Christianity, as delivered in the Scriptures*; And there demonstrated with an Evidence, that I am not able to resist. Yet let no body imagine, by this, that I am the Old Acquaintance of the Author of the *Growth of Deism*, who (he tells us) was convinced of the Reality of Revealed Religion, by the reading of that Book, and of *The Five Letters concerning the Inspiration*.

tion of the Holy Scriptures. For I neither know him, nor He me. Yet nevertheless, I own that I esteem That Book, and the last of those Letters, no less than he seems to do. Now, I say, the thing which I find in that Book, wherein all Sectaries agree, is, *That Jesus Christ is the Messiah, the Son of God, the King; Whom all, that believe him to be so, are obliged to obey.* And the General Agreement of all Sects in this, gives me, I confess, a strong presumption of its Truth: But the particular Evidence of it, in that Book, is irresistible. The Evidence, I mean, both that the Thing asserted is true; And that (whatever else may be true and useful) nothing but that alone is required.

150 A LETTER

required, *absolutely*, to denote and Characterise a Man a Christian.

Since therefore I am forced to own that, for my part, I know no better ; And now despair of any help from particular Sects ; I hope I may, without the Censure of those Sects, resume the Advice I was presuming to offer to those to whom I address this Letter. To *Deists*, I mean. I would fain perswade them to look in- to the True Grounds of *Chri- stianity*. What do I talk of perswading them to it ? They do it already. *Deism* it-self is the first Ground and Founda- tion of *Christianity*. Let them observe the Superstructure: And if any part of That be not so fitted.

fitted as to lye even and smooth upon this Foundation, let them, in God's Name, reject it. Such ill-hewn Stuff cannot be from him. His Works are all of a piece; And will be always found consistent. But if all Genuine Christianity, All that *Jesus Christ* himself made essential to it, be evidently an improvement of Natural Religion (which I call *Deism*) built upon it, fitted to it, compacted with it; So that the whole together makes one intricate Body, or System of Laws; Just and Reasonable, Worthy of the Supreme Legislator from whom they proceed, and all calculated and apparently contrived for the Benefit of Man; Then, methinks, I should not need

need to use many words to persuade any one to embrace it. Neither is that my intention. I only propound, that those who have not yet examined into the Matter, would please to do it, by that Draught of Christianity which the fore-mentioned Book presents us withal : And let them resist it if they can. For if they can do it, it is reasonable they should. Nay, as we are men, it is impossible for any one to do otherwise ; That is, to refuse Assent upon Conviction, or to believe contrary to it. After that Examination, I referr it to themselves to enter into more particular Enquiries, or desist, as they shall then judge necessary. But if, contrary.

trary to my expectation, any one of you, Gentlemen, to whom I have addressed this too tedious Letter, disagree with me (after such Examination) in what I have now at last particularly insisted upon; I beg of you, by the Bonds of Humanity, in which we are all united, to assist me in shaking off what you esteem to be Delusion; And to furnish me at the same time, instead of it, with some other more perfect Scheme of things; More agreeable to the Ideas we have of God, and more conducive to the Happiness of Man. Take only those two Considerations along with you, and in doing it effectually,

154 A LETTER, &c.

Actually, you will oblige, not
only me, but all Mankind.
I am,

Your affectionate Friend.

ERRATA.

Page 36. line 19. read *que.*

p. 104. l. 8. r. *vain.*

p. 117. l. 19. r. *this.*



FINIS.

